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New York

President:	Mr. Rycroft	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Fernández Revollo
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Vaverka
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2017/206)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2017/206)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Monseigneur Marcel Utembi, President of the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo; and Ms. Marie-Madeleine Kalala of the Common Cause Network.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/206, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I now give the floor to Mr. Sidikou.

Mr. Sidikou (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity you have offered me to speak to the Security Council today about the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

As emphasized in the report (S/2017/206) of the Secretary-General dated 10 March on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) (S/2017/206), the political and security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has undergone profound changes over the past months, thereby requiring an adjustment of the priorities and approach of MONUSCO.

The full implementation of the political agreement of 31 December 2016, which paves the way, in the clearest possible manner, to the holding of elections, requires the full support of the United Nations.

Some impediments will have to be removed. The ruling majority and the Rassemblement have opposing views on how to appoint the Prime Minister, as well as on the allocation of key roles in the Ministries for Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, Defence and Justice in the transitional Government that will be formed. The role that the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo (CENCO) could play in the finalization of the special provisions is also a source of discord.

The death of Etienne Tshisekedi had a significant impact on the political process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, further delaying the finalization of the special provisions, the appointment of the Prime Minister and the establishment of the national agreement and electoral process monitoring committee.

As long as the political dialogue remains at an impasse, there is a risk that tensions will rise. In February, some of the seminaries and parishes of the Catholic Church in Kananga, Kasai, Kinshasa and Lubumbashi in Katanga were attacked, presumably because of increased frustration among certain segments of the population at seeing the political process stall.

However, I wish to note that in the past few days the situation seems to be moving in the right direction. The appointment of the Deputy Secretary-General of the Union pour la démocratie et le progrès social, Félix Tshisekedi, as President of the Rassemblement, and of Pierre Lumbi, a representative of the Groupe des sept opposition coalition, to the head of the Conseil des sages of the Rassemblement resulted in the resumption of negotiations on the special provisions under the auspices of CENCO on 16 March. In addition, the Presidents of both houses of Parliament called for an irreversible and credible electoral process and expressed their support for the efforts of CENCO.

Notwithstanding the delays in the political process, significant progress has been made in updating the

voter registry. To date, more than 19 million voters have been enrolled, and the enrolment process is about to begin in the two remaining enrolment areas.

The logistical and technical support of MONUSCO to the enrolment process will come to an end at the end of this month. At that time MONUSCO will have transported approximately 3,000 tons of enrolment material through the Democratic Republic of the Congo. If authorized by the Security Council, MONUSCO is willing to provide technical and logistical support to the electoral process that goes beyond the updating of the voter registry.

(*spoke in English*)

The deteriorating security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains a source of major concern. As noted in the report of the Secretary-General, violence and threats to civilians are no longer concentrated in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo alone. Community-based violence and inter-ethnic clashes have spread from areas already affected by armed conflict, such as the Kivus, to Tanganyika, the three Kasai provinces, Lomami and Kongo Central. Armed group activity in the east has also increased, particularly of late with the resurfacing of former elements of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23).

The conduct of coordinated operations by the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) and MONUSCO against armed groups in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have helped maintain military pressure on the Allied Democratic Forces, the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda and the Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri, disrupting their activities. The FARDC has also been involved in actions against former M-23 elements who had recently crossed into the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The resurgence of violence in certain areas in the rest of the country has been exacerbated by the uncertain political situation, as well as the manipulation of grievances for political ends, and the provision of support to armed militias by some political actors. The increasing use of self-defence militias acting along ethnic lines points to a growing sense of insecurity and uncertainty. The risk of electoral violence also remains high, mainly in urban areas. The potential for violence is likely to increase further the longer the implementation of the 31 December agreement is stalled, thereby prolonging the current political uncertainty.

The spread of violence has been characterized by a significant increase in human rights violations. The year 2016 witnessed a 30 per cent increase in human rights violations as compared to 2015, with MONUSCO documenting a total of 5,190 human rights violations throughout the Democratic Republic of the Congo. State agents were responsible for 64 per cent of those violations, and armed groups were responsible for the remaining 36 per cent. I am particularly concerned by reports of the excessive use of force, human rights violations and the presence mass graves in the Kasai provinces. I have encouraged the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to conduct thorough investigations and to ensure that the perpetrators of those acts are held to full account. MONUSCO of course stands ready to provide its full support for the carrying out of those investigations.

I would like to emphasize again that only political solutions can address and halt the rising levels of violence now being witnessed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. For our part, MONUSCO remains fully engaged in protecting and promoting human rights and the political space and is strongly engaging with the relevant authorities on a regular basis to ensure that perpetrators of human rights violations are held accountable for their actions and are brought to justice. MONUSCO is also strictly applying the United Nations human rights due diligence policy for any and all support provided to State security actors in the implementation of its mandate.

I am also deeply concerned about the deteriorating socioeconomic and humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The continued depreciation of the Congolese franc, which has lost over 30 per cent of its value in the past year, the lack of foreign-currency reserves and the fiscal shortfall are having an increasing impact on the livelihoods of Congolese citizens, and will continue to do so in the coming months.

Those developments are coupled with a deteriorating humanitarian situation due to the intensifying violence. A total of 2.2 million persons are currently forcibly displaced. In Tanganyika province alone, violence forced approximataely 102,000 persons into displacement in the last quarter of 2016, while

the violence in the Kasais had displaced an estimated 225,000 persons by the end of January this year.

The 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan is funded at just over 60 per cent, putting pressure on the humanitarian community to respond to these new displacements. At the same time, refugees from South Sudan continue to cross into the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees having registered 28,000 refugees in areas close to the border by January of this year.

As highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General, the 31 December agreement provides a clear path towards the holding of elections, setting the stage for MONUSCO's drawdown and exit. The Mission's main strategic objective during the coming months will therefore be to support the establishment of an environment conducive to the timely holding of peaceful, credible and inclusive elections, in accordance with the provisions of the agreement. Accordingly, MONUSCO has already undertaken adjustments to its posture and operations. The Mission will continue to make such adjustments as may be required in the months ahead to ensure that it is well positioned to use the full range of tools and resources at its disposal to support the political and electoral process, contribute to the protection of civilians and assist with stabilization efforts.

The Mission has provided its full support to the CENCO-led dialogue efforts and in the updating of the voter registry. It has strengthened its civilian and military presence and operations in new areas of concern outside the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, specifically the Kasais and Tanganyika. We have also initiated a process of shifting key functions from Goma to Kinshasa, in order to strengthen the Mission headquarters. I have requested that the MONUSCO protection-of-civilians strategy be revised to address the threat to the civilian population from armed groups.

The report of the Secretary-General also sets out a package of measures aimed at enhancing the ability of the MONUSCO force to support the achievement of the Mission's strategic objectives in the current challenging security context through the adoption of a more mobile, flexible and agile posture. The Secretary-General has recommended the deployment of two additional formed police units (FPUs) to help the Congolese authorities address the potential threat of electoral and politically motivated violence in key urban centres where there is no police or FPU presence.

The primary responsibility for the implementation of the agreement rests with its signatories and will require the same level of commitment and compromise that led to its signing, on 31 December. MONUSCO will continue to provide support for the implementation of the agreement, while also supporting efforts to address the mounting threats faced by the civilian population during the transition period.

I thank you again, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Council today. I look forward to the ensuing discussions.

The President: I thank Mr. Sidikou for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Monseigneur Utembi.

Monseigneur Utembi (*spoke in French*): The National Episcopal Conference of the Congo (CENCO) would like to sincerely thank the President of the Security Council for having invited us to brief the members of the Council on the sociopolitical, security and economic situation prevailing in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the run-up to the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

We would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the ongoing support of the United Nations in the maintenance of peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. To that end, resolution 2277 (2016) calls upon the political and social stakeholders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to engage in an open and inclusive political dialogue on the holding of the presidential election in accordance with the Constitution. This two-stage dialogue, convened by the President of the Republic, led to the comprehensive and inclusive political agreement signed on 31 December 2016 at the Kinshasa Interdiocesan Centre, whose rapid and full implementation CENCO strongly urges.

With regard to the socio-political situation, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is currently in the throes of a sociopolitical, security and economic crisis of increasingly alarming proportions. All the elected bodies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have exceeded their mandate, a first in the history of our country since its independence.

Since the drafters of the Constitution did not envisage such a state of affairs, the comprehensive and inclusive political agreement signed at the Kinshasa Interdiocesan Centre is the only road map that could rescue the country from its current institutional crisis. Unfortunately, the special provisions for the implementation of the agreement have met with difficulties in being concluded. While the population is eagerly awaiting elections, the political status quo resulting from the intransigence of the negotiators on the remaining points of divergence, and kept in place by political chicanery and a lack of genuine political will, runs the risk of indefinitely postponing the full implementation of the 31 December agreement. It is also worth mentioning the delays in the implementation of measures designed to ease political tensions in the country.

The security situation, which is characterized by bloody clashes and human rights violations, remains a source of concern for a large part of the country, particularly in the Kasai provinces, where the rebellion against the central authorities, waged by Chief Kamuina Nsapu militia forces, is spiralling out of control. We deplore the hundreds of deaths, the exploitation of minors, who are being doubly victimized — by recruitment by the militias and the disproportionate acts of repression by the police — the interruption of schooling, the dearth of humanitarian assistance and the imminent risk of famine. There is even talk of mass graves. In the same area, two United Nations experts were abducted, as well as one interpreter and three motorcycle taxi drivers.

The Lord's Resistance Army is operating in the far north, together with the Mbororo, with the goal of fomenting misery among the local population. In North Kivu, in particular in the Beri and Lubero territories, a series of massacres of the population continues. In Tanganyika, the deadly clashes between the Bantu and the Twa that have resulted in the forced displacement of families are still simmering. There are continuing tensions in Kongo Central and in Kinshasa, which experienced deadly confrontations on 19 and 20 September and on 19 and 20 December 2016.

I should point out that the Catholic Church is also a victim of this tense and insecure situation. It has been targeted all over the country by hoodlums and insurgents who accuse it of not doing enough to enable the authorities to implement the New Year's Eve 2016 agreement. We deplore the physical and verbal threats that have been made to clerics in a number of dioceses, where some bishops have received threatening phone calls from insurgents. Some Church buildings, including presbyteries and convents, have been attacked, burned and looted.

With regard to the economy, the sociopolitical crisis, which is exacerbated by the generalized insecurity throughout the country, is not good for the nation's economic health. The value of the Congolese franc is falling daily against foreign currencies. Many public and private companies are idle, and it is the people who are the first victims, since their purchasing power is not enough to meet their basic needs.

What does the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo want from the Security Council? If this crisis continues, it runs the risk of rendering the agreement of 31 December obsolete and delaying the elections scheduled for December 2017, or indeed even calling for a referendum or amending the Constitution. In that regard, in the wake of the extraordinary meeting of the Assembly of Bishops on 20 to 25 February, CENCO appealed to the people of the Congo in an address entitled "Say no to the deadlock". We believe that the only way to control the crisis is through the comprehensive implementation of the New Year's Eve agreement and the formation of a national Government that possesses enough legitimacy, as well as the trust of the Congolese people, to enable it to organize the elections and ensure a democratic transfer of power.

Based on that, CENCO recommends, first, that the Security Council give political, diplomatic and legal support at the international level to the agreement of 31 December, as the only realistic road map that can enable the Democratic Republic of the Congo to emerge from the crisis. Secondly, we recommend that the Council support the institutions created on the basis of the agreement. Thirdly, the Council should renew and strengthen MONUSCO's mandate by reactivating its Intervention Brigade in order to ensure the security of the civilian population and give logistical support to the next elections.

Where the international community is concerned, particularly the African Union, the European Union, Great Britain and the United States of America, we recommend, first, that they provide substantial financial and logistical support to the organization of the forthcoming elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Secondly, we urge them to provide

humanitarian assistance to all the victims of the atrocities I have mentioned. Thirdly, they should put pressure on the political and social stakeholders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to commit to effectively implementing the agreement of 31 December. And, lastly, they should collaborate with the Congolese authorities in conducting an independent and objective investigation aimed at identifying those responsible for the massacres that have occurred, particularly in Beni, Tanganyika and the Kasai provinces, and for the bloody clashes in Kinshasa.

The President: I thank Monseigneur Utembi for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Kalala.

Ms. Kalala (*spoke in French*): Fate often has surprises in store for us. Almost 11 years ago, I was here in this Chamber to discuss the problem of child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo and how to end it (see S/PV.5494). I remember that we were pleased to see that there had been progress on the problem, but we noted that it had yet to be eliminated among the armed groups that were still active in the eastern part of the country. At the time I was Minister for Human Rights on behalf of civil society in the transitional Government. To be exact, it was July 2006, on the eve of our country's first free, credible and transparent elections, which we were all eagerly looking forward to. And here I am again today, against all expectations, with another opportunity to address the Security Council on the subject of the sociopolitical situation in my beloved country, for which I am honoured and very grateful.

While at that time the future looked bright, today we are compelled to admit that our efforts to achieve national cohesion have been crushed and that the issue of child soldiers is once again on the agenda. Since the presidential election of 2011, and in the wake of the failure to hold the elections that were supposed to bring the transfer of power in 2016, we are in the grip of a profound crisis, linked to the legitimacy of our institutions. Since that time we have had to deal with the outbreak of new insurgent movements such as the Kamwina Nsapu militia in Kasai Central and Bundu dia Kongo in Kongo Central and the fighting between Twa and Bantu communities in Tanganyika. We are also witnessing the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) reconstituted; a resurgence of petty criminality; a stagnant economic sector and its corollary, unemployment; galloping depreciation of the currency, which brings with it reduced purchasing power and makes life more precarious; corruption, human rights violations and restrictions on fundamental freedoms such as the right to peaceful protest — for example, young people being confronted as they demand a healthier environment — obstacles to people's access to basic social needs; the deterioration of infrastructure and so on and so forth. We can sum it up by saying that we have a failed State. Our citizens can no longer trust their institutions.

Need I remind the Council that it is a well-known fact that it is women, the elderly and children who are the first victims in such situations? How many times in this Chamber have we talked about the sexual violence that has been done to women in my country or their and their children's dreadful living conditions on the streets or accused of witchcraft? I am not going to revisit that. But I must point to the weakness of a judicial system that, despite some efforts, has been unable to provide a genuine response to the demands of justice. What is there to say about women's low rate of participation in decision-making? We should recall that of 32 participants in the meetings of the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO) only three were women — less than 10 per cent, the average in most of the country's institutions, when male-female parity is enshrined in our Constitution.

In order to respond to this dysfunctional State, political dialogue has emerged as the only way out of the crisis, as Monseigneur Utembi, President of the National Episcopal Conference of Congo, so eloquently said just now. In the firm belief of the reality of this, and aware that our long-suffering peoples are no longer willing to accept the path of arms, civil society has engaged in political negotiations under the auspices of both the African Union and CENCO, whose comprehensive and inclusive political agreement was signed on 31 December 2016.

Unfortunately, three months later, the process seems to have stalled. The signing of the specific arrangements to define the manner of implementing the agreement is overdue. The political actors are unable to honour the commitments they made freely. Unfortunately, every delay takes us further away from the possibility of holding of presidential, legislative and provincial elections, set for December 2017. No electoral calendar has been published thus far, and the people are increasingly tense.

That is why we believe it is urgent to collaborate with the African Union to further support CENCO's mediation efforts to swiftly set up a Government and, above all, a national council to follow up the implementation of the agreement, an institution charged with ensuring proper preparations for the elections and compliance with the road map. It should be borne in mind that such actions would contribute to the rapid implementation of a purely Congolese solution to the crisis.

I now turn to the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Civil society welcomes the Mission's actions both in its social and peacekeeping efforts and in its support for the electoral process. The people remember the successful operations it carried out jointly with the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo to fight various armed groups, including the M-23. However, people cannot explain the increase in killings in the east of the country, particularly in Beni, where not a week goes by without unimaginably cruel murders reported. The online circulation of those images have been met with total indifference on the part of the international community. "I am Beni" does not seem to garner as much attention as "I am Paris" or "I am Munich".

The Congolese people are still traumatized by the memories of attacks on villages located near MONUSCO camps, while the Mission did nothing to protect them. We are told that MONUSCO is a peacekeeping force that cannot impose peace. Go explain that to the poor citizens who see that the Mission has weapons and expect only its protection. I will perhaps be tactless in saying that this stance revolts both civil society and the population, which likens MONUSCO to a force that counts the dead. That is why, even as we welcome the renewal of MONUSCO's mandate, civil society calls upon the United Nations to reinforce it so as to enable the soldiers to play a more proactive and deterrent role. They must prevent incidents, not give in to them.

Since opportunity makes the thief, I would like to raise the painful issue of children fathered by members of United Nations contingents and abandoned after they are conceived. How can those innocent children be compensated for that injustice? Many grow up penniless in Goma, Kisangani, Mbandaka or elsewhere? Many have joined the ranks of street children, which we call "schégués" or "kulunas". I think that it would not be too much to ask for the Council to consider that issue and to respond in a way that acknowledges the situation and provides care for those children — because those who ought to bring hope cannot instead bring despair. We wish to keep hope alive.

The President: I thank Ms. Kalala for her briefing.

The representative of Uruguay has asked for the floor to make a statement.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation has asked for the floor because it believes that the purpose of briefing meetings of the Security Council is precisely that — to inform the membership on the work of the Council and, at the same time, for members to express their country's opinion, belief or position on the issue under consideration in the Council.

In that connection, I welcome Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and I thank Monseigneur Utembi and Ms. Kalala for their important briefings. We also convey our deep gratitude to Mr. Maman Sidikou, his entire team and the personnel of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for the work they carry out in very complex conditions.

I reiterate the commitment of Uruguay to restoring stability and peace to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, not only as an elected member of the Security Council but also as a consistent MONUSCO troop-contributing country for the past 16 years.

The broad and inclusive political agreement reached on 31 December, thanks to the important mediation role of the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo (CENCO), offers a viable path to the holding of peaceful, credible and inclusive elections — thus empowering the Democratic Republic of the Congo to move towards a more stable future. Nevertheless, nearly three months after it was signed, the implementation of the new political agreement remains stalled due to differences among signatory parties concerning the carrying out of the transition arrangements.

As the Secretary-General indicatein his report (S/2017/206), the most pressing task for the United Nations is to closely collaborate with its primary regional and international partners to support the implementation of the transition arrangements spelled out in the political agreement and to contribute to creating a favourable environment for the holding of

elections and the peaceful transfer of power as quickly as possible — December 2017 at the latest, pursuant to the agreement.

Uruguay is concerned about certain negative trends in the country for several months now. One of these is that insecurity is no longer primarily limited to the east of the country, but rather has spread to other areas such as the provinces of Kasai, Central Congo and Tanganyika. Violence between communities and challenges to the authority of the State are on the rise, to such a degree that the United Nations has also been a victim, with the recent disappearance of two members of the Group of Experts of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004). Similarly, the threat of violence in the main urban zones is also increasing as the election approaches.

Another alarming trend is the significant increase in violations of human rights, owing primarily to the shrinking democratic space. Uruguay reiterates that protecting and respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms is the responsibility of the national authorities, just as they must themselves show the greatest restraint in their responses to the legitimate protests of the population. Similarly, we call upon members of the opposition to act responsibly in ensuring peaceful demonstrations.

In the coming days, the Council will be negotiating the renewal of MONUSCO's mandate. Uruguay believes that the Secretary-General's recommendations to renew MONUSCO's mandate are valid, responsible and are adapted to the reality on the ground. In that regard, we are of the view that, in addition to lending its good offices and support to the political process, which is crucial at this time, MONUSCO must have an appropriate mandate and resources that would increase its ability to protect civilians and monitor human rights issues, especially where there is high risk of urban violence during the upcoming electoral period.

In a highly tense political situation, in which the security environment has deteriorated and there have been serious violations of human rights, it is very difficult to understand the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Government's attempt to reduce the scope of MONUSCO and seek an exit strategy.

In conclusion, I should like to make it very clear that there is no more time now for political games. It is time for the political actors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to commit to implementing the agreement that they themselves signed. The people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo deserve stability, democracy and peace in their country.

The President: I now give the floor to the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. She Okitundu (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): First, let me congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March. My delegation is particularly honoured to see the United Kingdom — a friend — steering the Council's deliberations. I would like to thank the Council for this opportunity to speak at today's meeting on the situation in my country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Secretary-General António Guterres and to convey to him best wishes on behalf of my Government as, like his predecessor, he discharges the noble mission assigned to the United Nations to bring much-needed peace to countries throughout the world, including my own. On behalf of the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Security Council for its continued and tireless efforts over the past several years to preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of my country and ensure its peace and stability.

My delegation takes note of the report (S/2017/206) of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), which was presented by Mr. Maman Sambo Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. To clarify, I believe that it is important to revisit a number of points in the report, in particular with regard to the political situation, the electoral process, the security situation, the human rights situation and the strategic dialogue between the Government and MONUSCO.

With the regard to the political situation, the Congolese political class as a whole, as well as other stakeholders in the country, have expressed a legitimate need for an inclusive political dialogue to address the sociopolitical crisis that my country faces. In that regard, on 28 November 2015, His Excellency President Joseph Kabila Kabange called for an inclusive

national political dialogue following eight months of preliminary talks with the opposition. That dialogue led to two agreements — one signed on 18 October 2016 at the headquarters of the African Union, following mediation by the African Union, headed by Mr. Edem Kodjo, and the other signed on 31 December 2016 at the Archdiocese of Kinshasa under the auspices of the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo (CENCO). Although both agreements sought to explore ways and means to organize free, democratic and transparent elections by consensus-based management of the pre-electoral period, the dialogue held on 18 October 2016 was considered to be non-inclusive because the Rassemblement des forces politiques et sociales de la République démocratique du Congo acquises au changement, the Front pour le Respect de la Constitution and a section of civil society did not participate. CENCO also suspended its participation.

After evaluating the two agreements, it must be acknowledged that the same issues raised at the headquarters of the African Union were also addressed at the Archdiocese of Kinshasa during the signing of the agreement on 31 December 2016, and they received identical comments. Such issues included the commitment of all parties to scrupulously respect the Constitution and the country's laws; the affirmation of the continuity of the State and its institutions; the appointment of a Prime Minister from the opposition; the establishment of a monitoring structure for the agreement; the holding of presidential, legislative, national and provincial elections, in that order; the election calendar and the recognition of the Independent National Electoral Commission as the organizer of the country's elections.

The political situation is currently dominated by the implementation of the political agreement of 31 December 2016, as well as the finalization of its specific arrangements. At this stage, two points of divergence remain in implementing the agreement. They are related to the procedures for presenting candidates to be appointed to the post of Prime Minister and to replace the president of the national council for the monitoring of the agreement. The specific arrangements govern the appointment of the Prime Minister; the setting up of the Government; the implementation of the national council for the monitoring of the agreement; the timetable for implementing the agreement; the revitalization of the Independent National Electoral Commission and the renewal of the Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel et de la communication.

With regard to the appointment of the Prime Minister, the Rassemblement is asked to present a list of the names of at least three candidates for that post, from among which the Head of State will appoint one, in accordance with article 78 of the Constitution. The President of the national council for the monitoring of the agreement was appointed by consensus and its new President should be appointed in the same manner. Given that the President of the national council for the monitoring of the agreement should be a member of the opposition, the Government asks the opposition, and in particular the Rassemblement, to resolve its dissension and agree on a candidate to replace the Etienne Tshisekedi. The Government would like to reassure the Council that it is in no way delaying the implementation of the agreement. The delay in the process is due to extraneous circumstances, in particular the death of Mr. Tshisekedi, which forced the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo to suspend its work. We believe that, with the resumption of negotiations on 16 March, the parties will find a way to reach agreement on those points of divergence.

Turning now to issue of elections, in his end-of-year speech to the nation on 31 December 2016, the President stated that he was determined to continue the process of organizing elections. In that regard, the Government is working to marshal the resources necessary to meet the needs of the Independent National Electoral Commission. Operations to revise the election calendar that began in July 2016 are ongoing throughout the country's various provinces. It should be noted that of the 25 provinces, in addition to the city of Kinshasa, work has already been carried out in 13 of them. The Independent National Electoral Commission has already started to provide election materials in the 13 remaining provinces. To date, nearly 20 million voters have already been registered, of the 41 million who are expected to be registered throughout the entire country. It goes without saying that the significant results achieved thus far by the Independent National Electoral Commission are essentially due to the efforts of the Government, which covers the various costs of operations on its own.

With regard to support from our partners, it should be pointed out that of the $123 million in multipartner funds earmarked for the Projet d'appui au cycle électoral au Congo, only 6 per cent of the total has been funded.

In addition, according to the information we have, that minimal funding is granted to non-governmental organizations and churches. On 31 July, the Independent National Electoral Commission intends to conclude all stages and address all technical demands related to the complete revamping of the electoral registry, which is the precondition for the holding of elections. As the Independent National Electoral Commission mentioned in its report submitted to the groups of experts of the Fifth Committee on the occasion of its mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in February — a copy of which was also submitted to the Council — MONUSCO support faces some challenges, which disrupts the schedule and causes delays in the provision of election materials. To give one example, in a province north of Bangui, of the 20 rotations planned, MONUSCO has organized only two flights and another private aircraft flight carrying three tons, thereby delaying operations by several days.

The Government is committed to sparing no effort to allow the Independent National Electoral Commission, along with support from the entire Congolese political class, to set the stage for a peaceful, credible and transparent electoral process. It therefore calls on the international community as well as all partners to effectively engage in the mobilization of resources to promote elections in my country by removing all preconditions.

In the area of security, I believe that it is useful to point out that the 148 territories that make up the administrative subdivisions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are under the authority of the Congolese State, which was not the case a few years ago. That positive development should therefore be noted despite occasional hotspots marked by tension.

The report under consideration highlights the worrying situation dominating the east of my country with the continued presence of the Allied Democratic Forces, the Lord's Resistance Army and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), as well as several national armed groups. With regard to that issue, I must reassure the Security Council that our armed forces, who have made great sacrifices in combating the negative forces, remain determined to persevere in their noble mission until those criminals are completely eliminated so that our people can live sustainably in peace and contribute to the development of their country.

To achieve that goal, our armed forces will continue to cooperate with MONUSCO. Given the mixed results achieved through that cooperation, however, my Government believes that an assessment must be made to objectively identify gaps in the implementation of commitments so as to enable us to achieve improved operational efficiency of the forces. It is unacceptable that the United Nations largest peacekeeping mission in the world, which has been in my country for approximately 20 years, is unable, with the means at its disposal, to end a crisis situation that has persisted for several years.

In that regard, the renewal of MONUSCO's mandate, which we support, must take into account the expectations of the Congolese people, whose most ardent wish is to see the negative forces and the various armed groups that are teeming in the eastern part of the country be completely eradicated. To achieve that end, it is imperative to strengthen the operational effectiveness of the United Nations forces, in particular the force Intervention Brigade, so that it can carry out the mission for which it was established — a mission that it carried out so well at the beginning of its mandate. Strengthening effectiveness must be accompanied by: first, the addition, if necessary, of a second Intervention Brigade unit; providing adequate means and equipment to effectively combat the asymmetric threats encountered on the ground; and better cooperation and information-sharing with the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC), especially with regard to information gathered by drones.

In March 2016, my Government informed the Council (see S/PV.7654) of the situation concerning the former rebels of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) when it noted the disappearance of many of them from the Bihanga military camp in Uganda in which they were cantoned. As the Council will note, those former rebels, who, in line with the Nairobi Declaration, had committed to never again resorting to weapons as a means of negotiation and to become a political party, have largely shown their bad faith through deliberately violating their commitments. Members of the Council will recall that, in accordance with the Nairobi Declaration, the President of the Republic pushed through a vote on an amnesty law so as to facilitate the return of those former combatants. Among the former combatants eligible for repatriation pursuant to that law, only a small number has agreed to be repatriated

from Uganda to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Despite all the steps that the Government has taken to convince those who remained to return to the country, no satisfactory results have been reached.

In the same vein, the ultimatum of 15 December 2015 of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) for the unconditional repatriation of all Congolese and non-Congolese members of the M-23 who took refuge in Uganda was rejected by the leadership of the M-23, which has taken those former rebels hostage. My Government condemns the military activities of the former rebels and calls on the Council to consider sanctions against them in accordance with the decision taken in New York on 29 September 2015 by the Heads of States signatories to the framework agreement at the sixth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. Moreover, my country deplores the duplicity and lack of frank cooperation on the part of certain neighbouring countries in resolving the issue. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is therefore asking the Council to call upon them to respect the commitments to which they freely subscribed under the framework agreement, convert them into actions and find political solutions to the obstacles preventing the repatriation of the former rebels.

With regard to the presence of fighters from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army within the opposition in our country, without rehashing the details of that issue, it is important to stress that the letters addressed to MONUSCO on 1 October 2016 and to the Council on 9 January respectively reflect my Government's position clearly. As specified in those two letters, my country calls on the United Nations to take the necessary steps to evacuate those combatants from our territory so as to spare us from reliving a situation similar to the one that we went through with the FDLR.

With regard to the latter negative force, I believe that it is important to remind the Council of the 340 FDLR combatants who voluntarily surrendered two years ago, as well as their dependents, who remain even today cantoned in transit camps in Kanyobagonga, North Kivu, Walungu, South Kivu and Kisangani in the province of Tshopo. Although we appreciate the treatment of those former combatants by MONUSCO, my Government renews its appeal, before the Council, to the international community for their repatriation to their country of origin or their resettlement to a third country other than those of the Great Lakes region. My Government is unable to comprehend the fact that the international community, which has always insisted on the eradication of that negative force, has so far not received a favourable response to that appeal, which could serve as an act of encouragement to convince those among them who have not yet laid down their weapons.

I should like to bring up the situation of the two members of the United Nations Panel of Experts whom we have lost track of and who have gone missing in Kasai. My Government deplores that disturbing disappearance and is committed to making every effort to find out more. At present, my country's security forces are actively carrying out investigations in cooperation with MONUSCO to locate them.

It would be remiss of me to conclude without saying a word about the situation concerning the tensions that have been felt in certain parts of the country. With regard to the members of the Kamuina Nsapu militia, an agreement was reached with family members of the Customary Chief of that group. Following that agreement, on 19 March 2017, the members of the militia agreed in Kananga to lay down their weapons. In Tanganyika, the Government's efforts have led to an amicable settlement of the conflict between the Luba and the ethnic Twa, or pygmy, communities. In Kongo Central and Kinshasa, calm has returned among the followers of Bundu dia Kongo with the arrest of Ne Muanda Nsemi.

With regard to the issue of the strategic dialogue, it should be recalled that that meeting was held from 9 to 19 March 2016 in Kinshasa between the Government and MONUSCO and yielded the following agreements that were signed onto by both parties. In all areas concerned, including North and South Kivu, reduction of the force is justified. In other areas such as the provinces of Tshopo, Tanganyika and Haut-Uélé, the presence of the force is not justified with the exception of the civilian protection unit. Concerning the majority of the residual security challenges, the MONUSCO force, with the exception of the Brigade Intervention, is no longer the answer. Almost all the actions to be undertaken are ultimately and essentially the responsibility of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Government therefore calls on the Security Council to formally recognize the conclusions of the Joint Working Group signed by both parties and recall the need to organize the second phase of the strategic

dialogue so as to set the timetable for the orderly and definitive withdrawal of MONUSCO from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

With regard to the actual reduction of the force, the Democratic Republic of the Congo calls for an assessment to be conducted with the Government and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations with the participation of the partners in the region, including the Southern African Development Community and the ICGLR, to reconcile the requirements of the reduction of the force with the imperatives of robustness and effectiveness.

With regard to the issue of human rights, the situation concerning fundamental freedoms in the Democratic Republic in no way feeds into a deliberate policy of violations of human rights. Accordingly, that falls within the scope of individual responsibilities, the derogation of which in all cases cannot go unpunished. In that regard, ad hoc bodies have the task of complementing the Government in improving the promotion and protection of human rights in a constructive partnership, and not in a useless confrontational struggle. The presence of the Joint United Nations Office on Human Rights attests to the fact that my country has accepted that that structure can represent the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights within its territory and that the Government is cooperating with it to the best of its ability.

However, the credibility of the reports produced by that entity poses a problem, as often they are not supported by evidence. I would like to recall that the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains among the countries that cooperate with the international community in the promotion of human rights. In July and August 2016, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo and clearly recognized at the end of the mission that significant progress had been made by the Government in this area.

In order to avoid the sad experience of the events of 19 and 20 September 2016, as a result of excesses of some opposition supporters who attacked people and property, public political demonstrations were temporarily suspended on an exceptional basis. With regard to freedom of public protest, the Constitution and the law on public protest establish only an intelligence system in order allow the administrative authorities to supervise demonstrators in accordance with the indicated itinerary and schedule. Nonetheless, public authorities remain primarily responsible for public order and security. In this respect, they may take the protective measures necessary in a democratic society to safeguard public order and avoid irreparable damage.

The material damage resulting from the events in Kinshasa on 19 and 20 September 2016 has been well documented by the Ministry of the Interior. The Prosecutor General opened investigations in order to identify and punish perpetrators. Of the 172 alleged perpetrators brought before the competent courts, 73 have been acquitted, 83 were sentenced to between 1 month and 20 years of prison, and about 20 minors were brought before juvenile courts. Public disorder accompanied by serious violations of citizens' rights, which was recently orchestrated by the followers of the Bundu dia Kongo movements, in the Kongo Central and Kamwena Nsapu in Kasai, are to be condemned. With regard to this last point, a video disseminated on social networks was the subject of investigations carried out by a team of senior magistrates of the Prosecutor's Office.

At this stage of the investigation, the Military Prosecutor announced, at a press conference on Saturday, 18 March in Kinshasa, that seven suspects, all elements of the FARDC, including two majors serving as Commander and Deputy Commander of Operations, were arrested. The operations and field investigations resulted in the arrest of the alleged suspects for the following offenses: war crimes by murder, war crimes by maiming, war crimes by cruel and inhuman and degrading treatment, and refusal to report crimes committed by persons subject to military jurisdiction.

Similarly, concerning the malicious destruction in February 2017 of the Catholic Church property in both Kinshasa and Lubumbashi, the court has been tireless in its efforts to identify and punish the perpetrators.

In terms of sexual violence, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is now on the path to consolidating the progress made in its policy to combat this scourge in all its forms. Since 2013, the Secretary-General's preliminary report on conflict-related violence reveals a decline in cases of sexual violence in my country. This noticeable decline is the result of systematic work to combat impunity carried out by the judiciary in general and, specifically, by the military judiciary.

In the light of those considerations, my Government believes it is now necessary for a far-reaching dialogue with the United Nations to remove the Democratic Republic of the Congo from the list of countries with high levels of rape. Along the same lines, the Government has been active in the fight against child recruitment in our armed forces. These efforts were reflected in an audit carried out in 2015 by an independent Swedish firm — MO Consulting — in collaboration with UNICEF, which confirmed the absence of children in our armed forces. In view of those results, my Government also requests the Democratic Republic of the Congo to be removed from the list of countries whose armies recruit and use children.

With regard to the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, resettlement and repatriation programme, a budget of $85 million had been agreed to fund the various activities of the programme over four years by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its partners. In accordance with that budget, the Democratic Republic of the Congo committed $10 million, MONUSCO committed $8 million and the World Bank and other partners are to provide $67 million. Besides my country and MONUSCO, which have disbursed their share, only the World Bank and Sweden have pledged and disbursed $21.5 million. A significant gap of about $50 million remains unfunded.

Despite this situation, of the 12,205 ex-combatants from the different armed groups active in the east of the country, to date 4,812 have been reintegrated and demobilized, 3,763 have been demobilized and returned to their respective communities for reintegration after completing a vocational training programme, 529 ex-combatants of M-23 have been demobilized and returned to their communities, and 25 foreign combatants were handed over to MONUSCO for repatriation to their countries of origin.

The wish of the Congolese people and that of my Government is that the next extension of the MONUSCO mandate brings us peace once and for all by putting an end to the daily tragedy that the people of in the eastern part of my country have been experiencing for many years.

In conclusion, I wish to express my Government's thanks to Mr. Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Mr. Said Djinnit, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region of Africa, for their commitment and dedication to the cause of my country and to the Great Lakes region.

The President: I would like to thank warmly all of our briefers, in particular Monseigneur Utembi and Ms. Kalala for travelling to New York to brief the Security Council. Their briefings have provided us with an invaluable insight at an important moment for their country.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.